

Amendments to the Claims:

1. (Previously Amended) A postage meter, including:

first control means operative to generate print data signals defining an invalid postage indicium, the print data signals including first print data signals defining a valid postage indicium and second print data signals defining a void marking;

authorized printing means operative in response to the generated print data signals to print a postage indicium on a mail item; and

second control means operative to prevent operation of the authorized printing means by the second print data signals, whereby the authorized printing means is operated by the first print data signals to print a valid postage indicium.

2. (Previously Amended) A postage meter as claimed in claim 1, wherein the generated print data signals comprise a series of strings of print data signals, first strings comprising first print data signals and second strings comprising second print data signals, a determined bit position of the strings of print data signals having a first binary value in respect of first print data signals and a second binary value in respect of second print data signals, and wherein the second control means is responsive to a binary value of the determined bit position to reject strings of print data signals in which the determined bit position has the second binary value.

3. (Previously Amended) A postage meter as claimed in claim 1, wherein the second control means is responsive to control signals generated by the first control means to reject the second print data signals defining the void marking.

4. (Previously Amended) A postage meter as claimed in claim 1, wherein the second control means stores a bit map of print data signals corresponding to the void marking and is operative to utilize the bit map to inhibit operation of the authorized printing means by print data signals defining the void marking.

5. (New) A method of printing postage indicia on mail items, including the steps of:
- generating print data signals defining an invalid postage indicium using first control means, the print data signals including first print data signals defining a valid postage indicium and second print data signals defining a void marking; and
- printing a postage indicium on a mail item using authorized printing means in response to the generated print data signals, wherein, in printing a valid postage indicium, the authorized printing means is operated by the first print data signals to print a valid postage indicium and operation of the authorized printing means by the second print data signals is prevented using second control means.
6. (New) A method as claimed in claim 5, wherein the generated print data signals comprise a series of strings of print data signals, first strings comprising first print data signals and second strings comprising second print data signals, a determined bit position of the strings of print data signals having a first binary value in respect of first print data signals and a second binary value in respect of second print data signals, and wherein the second control means is responsive to a binary value of the determined bit position to reject strings of print data signals in which the determined bit position has the second binary value.
7. (New) A method as claimed in claim 5, wherein the second control means is responsive to control signals generated by the first control means to reject the second print data signals defining the void marking.
8. (New) A method as claimed in claim 5, wherein the second control means stores a bit map of print data signals corresponding to the void marking and utilizes the bit map to inhibit operation of the authorized printing means by print data signals defining the void marking.